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The Gurnet - Part IX

By HERBERT BOARDMAN

[Written in 1935]

On Aug. 2, 1906, I went to Duxbury with a young man named Conrad Richardson of Boston who was stopping at the Inn. We called at the old Powder Point School, used as a hotel in summer. He was a very companionable young man, and I have often wondered what became of him.

On Aug. 13, 1906, I walked to Brant Rock and back for the first time. I had been curious for years to know what the place looked like, and, in 1904, I had got as far as Green Harbor. This year I was determined to go the whole distance and crossed over the dike from Green Harbor and was soon at Brant Rock itself. It seemed much as I thought it would -- a typical New England summer resort of the ordinary variety -- closely built up with cottages and other buildings. The great rock itself was the most attractive feature, a massive ledge of red stone jumping out of the water.

In those days the Gurnet Coast Guardsmen patrolled the beach each night, meeting the Brant Rock men at the little post house near the bridge. It was fun to accompany them on the watch occasionally. They carried mail for us and sent it through the Brant Rock post office, otherwise mail had to be sent to Plymouth or Duxbury. Until 1905, the Coast Guardsmen were off duty during June and July, so it was always an event when they went back on duty at midnight July 31.

There were 4 gravel schooners near the Gurnet in 1906. For many years, my grandfather sold gravel from the "back" beach to Boston firms for roofing material, so that many a Boston roof was covered with Gurnet gravel. The rather grim appearing schooners would anchor off shore and the workmen would come ashore in dories equipped with huge strainers through which they shovelled gravel into the boat. One of these gravelers was an eccentric old Irishman named Cadigan.

There was one exciting event in the summer of 1906. A Bostonian who had his sloop stolen came down on the "Old Colony" and saw his boat anchored near the whistling buoy. The thief escaped to the headland in a skiff, landed in a dangerous spot on the rocks and hustled up the beach. A phone call was sent to Duxbury, and the thief was apprehended.

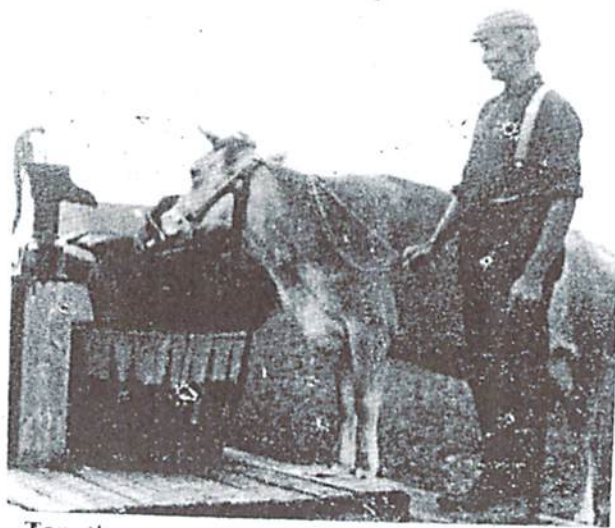
Other events of the summer were the driving of Harry Dennie's well and the capture of a tautog, 26 inches long, weighing 13 pounds. Lobsters, perch and flounders were also in abundance, as well as the ever-present Duxbury clams.

One day early in the summer, a dove flew into the Gurnet Inn. Mr. Fisher, the artist, thought this to be an omen. On Aug. 28, 1906, a son was born to Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Boardman Jr. The child lived only 3 days, and so little Gurnet Boardman rests in the Duxbury burial ground. Mr. Fisher, in his artistic booklet, notes the gradual washing away of the bluffs and closes with the following quotation: "The waves continue to break against the rocks of the Gurnet, but the strains of the whistling buoy sound more mournful than usual, for the soul of little Gurnet, like the dove, fled to regions unknown."

lover, Percy. She wore Henry Finney's trousers, a coat rather small and a Panama hat. Needless to say, the audience nearly dissolved in hysterics.

We also gave a dramatic representation of the tragic legend of Lover's Rock, which proved to be more comic than tragic. Mrs. Fred Holmes attended one of the rehearsals and made so many funny comments upon our art we were forced to abandon the rehearsal convulsed with laughter. I remember that Adele Howe played the part of Eunice; I was the stern parent, Captain Tom Burgess. We used an old bureau covered with a gray blanket as Lover's Rock. By the side of this artificial rock, we threw an old water-stained covering from the top of an ancient carriage--this was our ocean. Back of this highly imaginative ocean was a pail of water in which the hapless lovers were supposed to splash their hands when they jumped. This was to give the impression of angry swirling waters.

The audience entered at the far end of the pavilion, the actors using the room with the fireplace as a dressing room. All went well until my grandmother arrived late and, knowing nothing of our elaborate stage setting, entered by the back door. Our play was approaching its tragic climax, and grandmother appeared from behind Lover's Rock, calmly stepped over our ocean and seated herself with the other spectators. However, the play went over well, and the audience thrilled when Adele--as Eunice--leaped from the rock and made a beautiful splash.



Tom the caretaker waters cow. This article mentions the late Elisha Mowry who spent summers at the Gurnet before buying property in town. His daughters, Peggy and Eleanor, often stayed there with their small children. When I asked Peggy about refrigeration and how they kept the milk for the children, she answered, "We kept it in the cow."

With the passing of the summer of 1896, the record of Gurnet Inn closes as Mrs. Boardman never ran the house as a boarding house but used it as a summer home.

1907. This year Mrs. Boardman rented the front part of the house to a family named Graham of West Roxbury. Elisha Mowry of Providence, Rhode Island -- now the owner of 2 splendid houses -- came for the first time. His aim was to lead a simple life but his exuberance and energy plunged him into a round of pleasure with the other young people.

I visited the place late that summer and remember little about it. I remember an improvised high chair made for Marjorie to occupy -- a high stool with a shingle for a back. My father inquired if the chair was of the then very popular Mission variety. "Yes" emphatically replied Marjorie's mother "we are very particular to have everything strictly Mission!"

Mrs. Boardman rented the front of the house in 1908 to the family of Frank Ellis of Somerville. They were visited by J.W. Benjamin and his wife and Mr. and Mrs. Richard Walker with their twin daughters. The summer of 1908 was very lively, with many exciting incidents. We gave a play in the Pavillion, including an amusing sketch entitled "Percy and Gwendolyn." Harry Dennie and Mrs. Ellis were supposed to be the proud parents of a beautiful daughter named Gwendolyn. I played the part of Gwendolyn, dressed in female attire with a long braid of hair curling about my shoulder and beads around my neck. My aunt -- Mrs. Amy Boardman -- was my

Dr. Bertram Noyes--then a cottage owner and resident--was much impressed with these plays and, whenever he saw me afterward, always asked if I remembered these shows.

I took a second walk to Brant Rock in 1908 accompanied by Joseph Ellis. We had plenty of gaiety and music right at the Gurnet. My uncle, Fayette Boardman, had a phonograph with plenty of good records. We danced to the strains of "Merry Widow Waltz," "Waltz Dream" and the music of Oscar Straus. His little daughter, Marjorie, used to sing "School Days," giving the last line a personal twist--"When we were a couple of tids." When asked, "Who will carry the papers?" she would triumphantly declaim, "Hawkshaw, the detectatiff!"

The new government boathouse was erected in 1908 across the road from the station. There was a runway leading to the water's edge.

A number of sporty young men were occupying the Murphy cottage. There was some trouble and late at night one of the party, a bit under the influence of liquor, came to the house and asked to be driven up the beach. He agreed to pay \$10 and Mrs. Amy Boardman and Mrs. Ellis harnessed up the horse and buggy. While waiting, the man set his suitcase on the ground and was greatly startled when it suddenly appeared to be moving. The cow was allowed to stay out on pleasant nights, and her rope had become entangled with the suitcase. The only vehicle available was a one-seated buggy; so, Mrs. Boardman drove

with the passenger by her side, and Mrs. Ellis sat on the floor with a lantern. Before they had driven very far, the lantern blew out, and they didn't have any matches. Upon reaching Duxbury, they put the man and his suitcase out. He looked at the dark trees and shrubbery and exclaimed, "Are you going to leave me here all alone in this wilderness?" They assured him such was their intention and drove back, leaving him standing there. Fayette Boardman was substituting on the Coast Guard, and his wife had expected to meet him on his patrol, but she unfortunately missed him both ways.

About 1908, Harry Dennie built a comfortable new house on the site of his original portable cottage. The latter was sold and moved to another lot.

Another well-known Gurnet character was Daniel Graffam, an old Coast Guardsman, who lived alone in the present Gray cottage. He was taken ill with typhoid fever and needed care. The women on the point would not enter his home because their husbands were not present. Amy Boardman exclaimed, "What are they going to do--let the man die uncared for while they sit around waiting for their husbands to come?" She cared for him until he was moved to Plymouth where he later died.